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Written statement* submitted by the World Evangelical Alliance, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2018]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Sudan: Ongoing Imprisonment and Intimidation of Church Leaders, Confiscation and Destruction of Church Property

1. Churches and Christians in Sudan face a variety of violations of their rights to Freedom of Religion or Belief. Pressure from state authorities takes the form of imprisonment of church leaders, confiscation and destruction of church property, and significant other intimidation forcing church leaders to flee.

2. The following is a summary account of violations of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Demolition of Church Properties

3. The Sudanese Government has a long history of oppressing Christians in Sudan, which intensified following the secession of Southern Sudan in 2011. Since then, the authorities have demolished at least five churches in major cities and confiscated, closed or otherwise interrupted the running of several other churches or Christian institutions.

4. In August 2016, the authorities informed leaders of three churches in the Hajj Yousef area of Khartoum of the scheduled demolition of their churches within 72 hours. The churches belong to the Sudan Church of Christ (SCOC) and Baptist denominations. In October 2016, five more churches were scheduled for demolition in the Bahri, Soba and Jebel Aulia areas of Khartoum. Three of these belong to the SCOC, one to the Presbyterian Church and one to the Episcopal Church. When a court ordered the authorities to produce the demolition order it became apparent that 25 churches were scheduled for demolition. In early 2017 the authorities added two more churches to this list: SCOC church buildings located in Soba al-Aradi and al-Gadisia. These latter two buildings were demolished on 7 and 17 May respectively. On 11 February 2018, the government demolished a church that was on the original list of 25 churches, a SPEC church in Hajj Yousef.

5. The authorities claim these church buildings violate zoning laws and are not properly licensed. However, the authorities refuse requests for the licensing of existing church buildings and for permission to build new church buildings. The government claims that, since most Christians relocated to Southern Sudan following secession, the number of existing, recognized church buildings is sufficient for the remaining Christian communities. However, the demolition of unlicensed church buildings and the refusal to license existing buildings or build new ones leaves Christians in many areas on the outskirts of Khartoum without a place of worship.

Unlawful Confiscation & Sale of Church Properties

6. In 2017 the Sudanese authorities continue to confiscate church properties or threaten churches with confiscations. The government does this by illegally appointing committees within church denomination structures which then "sell off" church properties to businessmen allied to the government. The following is a non-exhaustive list.

7. In 2012, the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) dismissed a Church committee, headed by Mr. Hamad Muhammad Salah, for committing fraud, and appointed a new committee, headed by Mr. Raafat Samir. However, Mr. Salah complained to the Government, which "reinstated" the old committee even though the Government has no legal authority to appoint individuals or committees in church denominations. This illegal committee has been selling church properties to businessmen aligned with the Government since 2013. This has led to several Church properties being forcibly confiscated or demolished.

8. On 3 April 2017, a number of Christians had gathered at the Evangelical School in Omdurman (also belonging to the SPEC) as part of a three-day peaceful protest against the illegal appropriation of the school by a

businessman. The police came and arrested all the men, leaving the women behind. Then a group of about 20 people entered the school premises with knives and other weapons and began to beat the women. Several men from the nearby Bahri Evangelical Church rushed to the church to try and protect the women. The armed men attacked them and two church members were stabbed. Younan Abdullah, an elder in Bahri Evangelical Church, later died of his injuries. A second church member, Ayoub Kumama, was treated at a nearby hospital. During the attack, the police were present but failed to intervene or help Younan after he was stabbed. Following the death of Younan the police arrested Shamshoun Hamoud, a member of the illegal committee as identified by eye witnesses as the person who stabbed Younan. None of the other attackers were arrested.

9. On 26 April 2017, police and an armed mob attacked the same SPEC compound in Omdurman and entered the living quarters of the church guard, Azhari Tambra. His wife, Mona Matta, and their three children were arrested and held in custody for twelve hours and their belongings were destroyed. The police and the mob attacked and occupied part of the church compound without legal documents and no longer allow access.

10. On 15 August 2017, the authorities evicted Rev. Yahia Abdelrahim Nalu, a leader of SPEC, from his home on the SPEC compound in Omdurman. The belongings of Rev. Yahia and his family were removed from the house, which is owned by the SPEC. On 21 August 2017, Rev. Yahia went to court to appeal the eviction order but was detained and charged with "criminal trespass". He was released on bail later that day. Rev. Yahia, his wife, son and his mother, have no alternative housing option and are forced to stay at the church and rely on other fellow Christians for help. They were finally acquitted due to insufficient evidence in April 2018.

11. The authorities have similarly imposed an illegal church committee on the Sudan Church of Christ (SCOC) which has started to claim ownership of church properties (see below).

12. Currently there are at least 3 court cases ongoing against Christians who peacefully resisted the unlawful confiscations of parts of SPEC compound in Omdurman: (1) one case against Azhari Tambra, his wife, Mona Matta, (see above) and 2 others. (2) one ongoing case against 24 Christian defendants (initially there were 25 defendants, but one, Younan Abdullah, was killed on April 3, 2017, during a confiscation attempt, see above). (3) A third case involving 11 Christians accused of resisting confiscation efforts.

Arrest & Harassment of Church Leaders & Elders

13. Church leaders in Sudan are monitored by the Sudanese Government and are often reluctant to report the violations of religious freedom and harassment that they face, fearing arrest and imprisonment.

14. In December 2015, the authorities arrested four Christians: Rev. Hassan Abduraheem Kodi Taour, Mr. Abdulmonem Abdumawla, Rev. Kuwa Shamal Abazmam Kurri and Mr. Petr Jasek, a Czech national. All four were charged with "espionage", "inciting strife between communities" and several other offences. On 2 January 2017, Rev. Kuwa was acquitted of all charges. However, on 29 January 2017, the court sentenced Mr. Jasek to life imprisonment for espionage, and lesser sentences for other charges. Rev. Hassan and Mr. Abdulmonem were each sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for abetting Mr. Jasek in the crime of espionage, and two years each for lesser crimes.

15. Mr. Jasek was released after a presidential pardon on 26 February 2017 and allowed to leave the country. Rev. Hassan and Mr. Abdelmonem received a presidential pardon and were released on 11 May 2017. Both men continued to feel threatened and were granted humanitarian parole visas by the USA in September 2017. However, the Sudanese authorities made exit visas conditional on the visit to Sudan of the Congressman who sponsored their humanitarian parole visas, Rep. Tom Garrett. However, in spite of the recent visit to Sudan of Rep. Garrett, both men had their exit visas refused by the authorities.

16. The Government has put SCOC leaders under pressure by arresting a number of church members. On 23 August 2017, the authorities arrested at least four SCOC members, charging them with refusing to comply with an order to turn over leadership of their congregations and ownership of their buildings to a government-appointed committee. Sudan's Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments had written a letter, dated 14 August 2017, ordering them to hand over church leadership to the committee appointed by the government ministry. When they refused, police opened a case against them, though the legal basis for such a case remains unclear. The men were released on bail pending their trial.

17. On 8 August 2018, the judge ruled in favor of the legitimate church committee and returned administration of SCOC properties back to the church. The five church leaders, including the SCOC president Ayouba Telyan, were able to return to offices the next day.

Recommendations

18. In order to respect its obligations under international law, the government of Sudan should pursue the following:

- an end to punishments for and prosecutions of blasphemy and apostasy
- an end to the confiscation or demolition of church buildings
- an end to the illegal interference in the operations of church denominations and the harassment of church leaders
- a reversal of the ban on the construction of new churches and the licensing of existing church buildings